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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 002625

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR PRM/AFR, AF/E
GENEVA FOR POL/RMA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/02/2019

TAGS: PREF PREL ET SO

SUBJECT: CONFLICTING RUMORS OF RECRUITMENT OF SOMALI ASYLUM SEEKERS IN DOLO ODO

REF: A. A) NAIROBI 2169
B. B) NAIROBI 2141

Classified By: Classified by Acting Charge d'Affaires Tulinabo Mushingi
for reasons 1.4 (c) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: UNHCR and the Administration of Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) deny that recruitment of refugees or Somali asylum seekers to fight for the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) against Al-Shabaab in Somalia is occurring either in the Dolo Odo transit center or Boquolmayo refugee camp. However, some international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the field have suspicions of recruitment, especially given the proximity of the transit center to an Ethiopian military camp, but cannot offer any tangible proof. These rumors may have stemmed in part from media reports and Embassy Nairobi reporting of Kenyan-Somalis and Somali refugees being recruited out of Northeast Province and Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya and the possibility of the same activities happening in Ethiopia. End Summary.

Background

¶2. (C) In October, Embassy Nairobi reported on Kenyan-Somalis from Northeast Province and Somali refugees in Dadaab refugee camp being recruited to fight for the TFG against Al-Shabaab in Somalia (Refs A&B). As part of this reporting, UNHCR Kenya Country Representative Liz Ahua stated that she had received an unconfirmed report of 300 asylum seekers being recruited out of the Dolo Odo (also known as Dollo Ado) transit center (Reftel B). The Dolo Odo transit center is located less than three kilometers from the Ethiopian/Somali border in southern Ethiopia and currently houses between 5,000-6,000 refugees awaiting transfer to Boquolmayo refugee camp located 85 kilometers from Dolo Odo. Dolo Odo also houses a large Ethiopian military camp that is located near the transit center.

Conflicting Reports

¶3. (C) UNHCR Ethiopia and ARRA deny that any recruitment of refugees or Somali asylum seekers is occurring in either Dolo Odo transit center or Boquolmayo refugee camp. UNHCR Ethiopia Deputy Country Representative Cosmas Chanda stated his office had investigated these rumors but did not receive any confirmation from UNHCR field staff or from local ARRA or other government officials. International NGOs, on the other hand, have conflicting opinions on the subject of recruitment in Boquolmayo camp and the transit center. In casual conversations, some NGOs opined that recruitment "must be going on" due to the proximity of the transit center to the military camp but could not provide any confirming information. There is also a common belief among some NGOs

that GOE only put a refugee camp near Dolo Odo to facilitate recruitment and military training as the lack of water, food, distance from other towns and subsequent transportation challenges do not make an ideal setting for a refugee camp. However, other NGOs concur with UNHCR and ARRA that there is no evidence of recruitment. Two NGOs working in Boquolmayo camp and Dolo Odo, the Dutch NGO ZOA and International Medical Corps (IMC), both reported that they had not heard of any recruitment.

Comment

¶4. (C) It is not uncommon to hear rumors of recruitment in refugee camps; however, in the case of the Dolo Odo transit center and Boquolmayo camp, these rumors are very nebulous and seem to be based primarily on the musings of some NGOs. At the same time, if recruitment was taking place in refugee camps in Ethiopia, we are not confident that UNHCR and ARRA would be forthcoming about it for two reasons: 1) ARRA and UNHCR staff in the camps might not be energized or motivated enough to thoroughly investigate the claims without pressure or direction from the UNHCR office in Addis Ababa, and 2) in the GOE organization structure, ARRA falls under the Internal Security Ministry, a government body that would be well-aware of any recruitment operations. Overall though, this differs greatly from the situation in Kenya where a variety of sources reported on specific instances of recruitment. This incident also provides a good opportunity to reiterate to the GOE the continued need to respect international humanitarian law by ensuring that refugee camps in Ethiopia remain civilian in character and not become a site of recruitment in

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the future.

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